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the life and ministry of



OSWALD SMITH

1889-
CHRISTIAN HALL OF FAME
SERIES
No. 16

by Ed Reese

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Reese, Edward
The life and ministry of
Oswald Smith

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1. Biographies have always been used of God to stimulate more service for Christ. Paul said, "Be ye followers of me as I am also of Christ." Only eternity will reveal how many have gone into Christian service or a deeper walk with God as a result of reading such as David Brainerd's journal.

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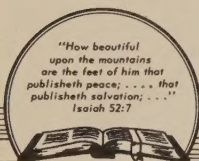
3. Biographies introduce people to us whom we might not know, or perhaps have misunderstood. This would be especially true of people now living. In a day when Christians seem to be divided into many "camps", it is hoped that this series will help give all true believers a new appreciation of ministries other than their own.

4. Biographies introduce us to people we will soon be living with for all eternity. The "family of God" is such a wonderful family. If you do not have the assurance that heaven is your home, that your sins have been forgiven, and that Jesus Christ lives in and through your life, please write us. We would like to introduce you to the Saviour, and welcome you to this wonderful eternal family.

ED REESE, Psalm 35:28.

CHRISTIAN HALL OF FAME SERIES

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Oswald Jeffery Smith

BORN: November 8, 1889
Odessa, Ontario, Canada

Pastor, evangelist, missionary statesman, author, hymn-writer, world traveler, poet, editor — Oswald J. Smith is one of the most versatile Christian leaders in the history of the Christian church. Perhaps never has one man done so many different things well. It all centered in Toronto, Ontario where Smith pastored from 1915 to 1959. He raised some fourteen million dollars for foreign missions, more than any other pastor in history. Half of this was from his own church.

Smith was a country boy and the eldest of ten children, the sixth son of Benjamin and Alice Smith. The father was a telegraph operator for the Canadian Pacific Railway. The family moved from Odessa, to Walkerville, to Woodstock and finally to Embro. Delicate in health most of his life, he was not expected to live to manhood. He trudged one and a half miles to school and attended the local church and Sunday school. At age 13 his Sunday school teacher said, "Any of you boys might be a minister." He thought in that direction from that time on. His conversion at age 16 was the result of the Torrey-Alexander evangelistic team. He had been reading about the Torrey crusade in Toronto which the newspapers were describing. The reports of 3,000 gathering only 90 miles away challenged him to take a trip to Toronto. Attending the Massey Hall services for a few days, he was saved at the seventh service — one for boys and young men only, held January 28, 1906. Torrey preached on Isaiah 53:5. He soon decided that Toronto was the place to get a job. For a while he identified with a group of Christians called the Hornerites. Soon he spoke to a couple of youth groups in Mount Albert where his family had now moved plus the

Beverly Street Baptist Church in Toronto. He began to attend Toronto Bible College evening school. This helped fire him up so that he applied to the Presbyterian Church for a mission field appointment. They rejected the desires of the brash 18 year old. He then began to sell Bibles, and was very successful in this venture. Then came another chance to preach — at the Severn Methodist Church, plus two more services in near-by circuit churches the same day. He then got a call from the Bible Society in Vancouver and so he was off on a train journey of six days to western Canada. In September of 1908 he began his work at Prince Rupert Island working his way up the coast selling Bibles and making contacts for the local pastors, making calls in remote lumber camps and homes. He soon ended up at Port Essington some 30 miles away. For the next few months, Smith sold Bibles and preached to the Indians. He met a Methodist missionary, G. H. Raley who wanted Smith as his associate to minister during the winter to the Indians at Hartley Bay. Smith got his supplies, which were \$20 worth of food, a small cook stove, an axe, a hammer and nails, two quilts, a blanket, plus fifteen jars of fruit and jelly. Arriving at the village, he found it almost covered by deep snow and as bleak and barren as he had ever seen. Stoic Indians met him. That winter was the most difficult time of his life. Soaking clothes and nights of bitter cold followed as Smith fought with his stove in a desperate effort to keep the green wood burning and the small quarters warm. This experience drove him closer to the Lord and also gave him an empathy with missionaries and their problems for years to come. He started a Sunday school, preached twice on Sundays and four times during the week, plus teaching the Indian children at school. By April, 1909 he resumed his work selling Bibles, up and down the coast of British Columbia, plus preaching wherever he could.

Feeling the need for additional training, he went to the Manitoba College in Winnipeg in the fall of 1909. Returning home to Mount Albert for the Christmas holidays his parents and friends heard him preach for the first time. This was

quite a contrast to his previous holiday season when he was with a few Indians in the wilds of British Columbia.

Feeling a spiritual lack at the Manitoba school, he entered Toronto Bible College in the fall of 1910. By late November, Smith was chosen along with five other students to be one of the speakers at the Students' Public Meeting. His subject was "A Call to the Foreign Field" for his interest in missions was now beginning to grow. On December 8, 1910 he surrendered completely to God. His dairy states:

The great struggle is over, I surrendered completely to God. I now trust that He will send me out to the foreign field. I do not care if my life is hidden away, unknown by the civilized world, as long as it is known to Him.

At age 21, in January of 1911 he decided to hold a revival in Toronto — his first extended campaign. He used the Missionary Tabernacle, prepared 3,000 posters, and prepared his messages. Five were saved, and on Friday night Jennie Tyrrell sang. Five years of courtship followed. Soon J. Wilbur Chapman and Charles Alexander held a large crusade in Massey Hall where Smith served as an usher and then as a counselor. Then in mid-summer 1911, he took a position with the Pocket Testament League of Canada to become their first traveling secretary, which gave him exposure throughout various areas in Ontario. Then in November he became pastor of the Belwood (Ontario) Congregational Church. A second church at Garafraxa used his services simultaneously. Graduating from Toronto Bible College, he went off to Chicago in the fall of 1912 to begin further studies at McCormick Theological Seminary, strong Presbyterian school in those days. In February of 1913 he assumed the pastorship of the Millard Avenue Presbyterian Church on Chicago's southwest side. He continued until May, then decided he would minister amongst the hills of Kentucky. He was assigned to a place called Cawood, a very small hamlet consisting of a combined store — post office and one house, as home base. Again like British Columbia it was a

lonely ministry. Out of these experiences came some of his finest poems which set the tone for much of his writings in later years. Towards the end of the summer revival transpired at a place called Turtle Creek. His next year at McCormick Seminary (1913-14) saw him pastor the South Chicago Presbyterian Church also. His engagement to Miss Tyrrell was broken by mutual agreement in March, 1914.

He had begun to write verse in 1906 (age 17) and on September 5, 1914 he saw his first collection of hymns published. D.B. Towner had provided the music. Three days later, he wrote a well known hymn, *Deeper and Deeper*. On April 29, 1915 he graduated from McCormick Theological Seminary, and on the following night he was ordained in the church where he pastored. That day he spent in prayer, and he became convinced of two things – his work would be world-wide in coverage and Toronto would be his home base. The congregation begged him to stay, but he felt impressed to take an associate pastor's position at the Dale Presbyterian Church in Toronto, where J.D. Morrow pastored.

June 6, 1915 begins a life time of ministry in Toronto. Smith served with vigor at this work, and was impressed with one – Daisy Billings who was the senior deaconess at the church. By the spring of 1916 he was physically exhausted and had to take a complete rest and went to Clifton Springs, New York for an extended vacation. On September 12, 1916 he married Daisy Billings in a ceremony at the church by their pastor J. D. Morrow. 2,000 attended. Dale became the center of evangelism. Smith was learning fast from Morrow and soon was doing considerable preaching there. Morrow decided to become a chaplain in 1916 and Smith was made the pastor of this the second largest Presbyterian Church in Canada. In September of 1917 a real revival came to the church which prompted Smith to write, *A Revival Hymn*. Morrow returned only briefly, but with failing health moved on to California to die in 1921. Smith's strong stand began to cause a concern amongst the liberal element as has happened so often in

history. It was the irritating revival meetings, the use of gospel hymns, the prayer meetings, the \$600 raised for missions. So in October of 1918, he terminated his ministry. Their first son, Glen was born June 22, 1917. A call was given to return to British Columbia under the Shantymen's Christian Association. Settling his family following their arrival on April 1, 1919 he began to preach to a needy and forgotten section of Canada's society. However a vision of Toronto and its masses burned in his soul, so he returned later in the year and served in various Christian causes until it was God's time to open up the right doors. On February 4, 1920 his only daughter Hope was born. Smith spent part of this summer in Kentucky again.

Smith now 30 years of age decided it was time for action. Renting the West End YMCA he started his own services in October of 1920 calling the work the Gospel Tabernacle. 64 showed up in the 750 seat auditorium for the first service. Three months later this new work merged with the Parkdale C.M. & A. Church and Smith became the pastor of the new work in January of 1921. On June 1, 1921 their third child Paul was born. He later would succeed his father as Pastor of the famed People's Church. A tent meeting to attract attention did just that when Smith had a "Bring your own chair" shower on Sunday July 3. The tent was filled with every kind of kitchen chair imaginable. A new church was soon needed. For \$40,000 they built an 80 foot x 130 foot auditorium seating 1,800. Paul Rader dedicated it on May 14, 1922 and the new work was called the Alliance Tabernacle. He packed the auditorium by giving the people something they could not get any other place - variety. The best evangelists and singers in North America were constantly streaming across his platform. Establishing this kind of program made it easier for him to be gone weeks and months at a time later, because the people were used to different men filling the pulpit. He was now getting calls for many ministries elsewhere. The Alliance Tabernacle of New York called him to succeed A. B. Simpson but he declined. One of the

speakers at his church was William Fetler of the Russian Missionary Society who had a burden for the Russian origin populace of the Baltic countries who were ripe for the Gospel. Smith sailed on July 2, 1924 on his first of many trips outside the continent. Smith and Fetler had great meetings, with many of the auditoriums seating over 2,000 in such places as Latvia and Poland. Back in Toronto with additional influence the church grew until at times 1,000 would be turned away from a service. Smith pioneered soul-winning in Toronto. Gospel singing, intense evangelistic crusades, with a teaching ministry on Wednesday and Friday nights continued to inspire the Christians throughout the area. He resigned in 1926 and did a years worth of evangelistic efforts. In April, 1927 he accepted a call to The Gospel Tabernacle of Los Angeles, California. But Toronto was in his heart. Even though he was drawing crowds up to 2,200 and his church offered to build a 3,000 seat auditorium if he remained, he left in April, 1928 to go "back home."

Most people start at the bottom and work up – but not Smith. He rented Massey Hall and on September 9, 1928 at this first service he faced an audience of nearly 2,000 people. The Cosmopolitan Tabernacle was born, the crowds grew and so did the number of converts. On January 13, 1929 he was off to the Baltic countries for his second trip, now at the invitation of Paul Rader. He visited many countries this time. In Latvia over 2,000 were saved and one night a crowd of 1,300 sang his song *Saved*, which was the first time he had heard one of his songs in a foreign tongue. He returned to Massey Hall, then on March 30, 1930 they moved to a permanent address – the empty 1,500 seat St. James Square Presbyterian Church on Gerrard Street East. It was now called the Toronto Gospel Tabernacle. He put the church on radio and kicked off the new work with a missionary convention. Soon it grew and he decided to move once again which he did to the empty Central Methodist Church on July 1, 1934. The name The Peoples Church, 100 Bloor Street

East became famous from that time on. Smith was now pastoring the largest church in Canada, and was often quoted in the media. Music was at its best, the Back Home Hour broadcast followed the evening service, the missionary conventions, the evangelistic crusades all helped bring in the crowds. The annual missionary conference going often for a full month was to eventually get \$300,000 annually in Faith promise offerings, a technique Smith has widely and successfully utilized. The convention is loaded with mottos and displays from various missionaries. A large thermometer tells the congregation how they were doing toward their goal.

Evangelism was emphasized. Soon nearly 500 were saved each year, besides those in radio. Eldon B. Lehman was an early musical director and had a choir of 135 voices and an orchestra of 40 pieces. Sometimes the evening crowds would be higher than the morning. Curtailing newspaper advertising for several years did not hold the crowds back. They had a \$40,000 pipe organ that took too much space, so they sold it and built a second gallery. A 1944 evangelism crusade was moved to Massey Hall, and eventually to Maple Leaf Gardens. Over 11,000 attended two Sunday nights.

On January 1, 1959 Smith turned over the reins to his son Paul while still enjoying such titles as founder, missionary pastor, pastor emeritus. It was in 1963 that the church was sold for \$650,000 and a new church was built in the suburbs of Willowdale, where he resides. The original investment in the former church was only \$75,000, so that in essence Smith and his associates were given a brand new church worth \$575,000 absolutely free. How can anyone else get something like this? Smith replies, "All you have to do is give 5 million dollars to foreign missions over a 25-year period and God will give you a \$500,000 church."

Smith's hymn writing has been an outlet for his feelings and emotions in hours of deepest depression and heartache. *Jesus Only* and *Christ is Coming Back Again* were some of the early songs. One of his songs, *Saved*, written in 1917, was the first of his hymns to gain universal

attention. More than 1,200 hymn-poems followed, with musical settings by Ackley, Stebbins, Harkness, Towner, and other famed composers, with C. M. Alexander as publisher.

After Towner and Alexander died there was a lull until he met B. D. Ackley in 1930. Hymn after hymn Smith wrote and sent to him. Ackley provided music that fit the words and they began to be published by the Rodeheaver-Hall-Mack Company. From 1931 to 1946 there were 73 hymns that the two worked on together and that were successfully published. They became favorites over night, and people everywhere were singing them.

Smith brought well known Christian songs to the public year after year. In 1931, *Joy in Serving Jesus*; 1932, *The Saviour Can Solve Every Problem*; 1933 *A Revival Hymn*; 1934 *The Glory of His Presence*; 1935 *Take Thou O Lord*; 1936 *His Love is All My Plea*; 1937 *God Understands*; 1938 *The Song of the Soul Set Free*; 1939 *The Need of the World is Jesus*; 1940 *Then Jesus Came*; 1941 *A Wedding Prayer*; 1942 *Surrender*.

His many hymns and poems make him one of the most widely used song writers. A few of the stories behind the hymns are *The Glory of His Presence* written in 1934 in the middle of the night. *God Understands* came as a result of Smith's youngest sister, Ruth and her husband Cliff Bicker's plans to come home from Peru on their first furlough from missionary work. Just before leaving Bicker was killed in an automobile accident. *Then Jesus Came* was written in 1939 in Philadelphia. Rodeheaver had asked for a song depicting the change in men when Jesus came. He soon had a new solo to sing. A. H. Ackley gave him the music for *The Song of the Soul Set Free* and soon had the words for this widely used choir number.

To sum it up seems as though you are describing the work of several men: As a pastor Smith has ministered in Toronto since 1915. His congregation numbered about 3,500. About 2,000 attended the services, often three times a Sunday.

As an evangelist, he has preached in the greatest churches

in the world, and held some of the largest campaigns ever held in many places of the world.

As a Missionary Statesman he has led his church in a program that now nets over \$700,000 (growing each year) annually for foreign missions, more than any church on the face of the earth. The ratio in the budget being \$7 to \$1 in favor of foreign missions. This helps to support 350 missionaries from 35 faith missionary societies in 40 countries of the world. He has stimulated this kind of program via the Missionary Convention route in scores of churches.

As an author, he has some 35 books out which have sold over a million copies. Produced by Marshall, Morgan and Scott of England, the only author to surpass him in volume in the history of the publishing company is G. Campbell Morgan. His books, *The Passion for Souls* and *The Cry of the World* are the most challenging and practical books on missions ever written. Other titles are such as *The Man God Blesses*, *The Work God Blesses*, *The Revival We Need*, and scores more.

As an editor, he has published a magazine (*The People's Magazine*) for 36 years, which enjoys a world wide circulation.

As a radio preacher his church services were carried by as many as 42 stations at a time. In later years he has conducted "Radio Missionary Conventions" in major cities across the United States and Canada, challenging Christians and raising funds for the World Literature Crusade movement, of which he is honorary president.

As a world traveler, he has toured 72 countries. His first major overseas tour was in 1924 when he visited nine countries in Europe.

Tours since then have included 1929 – England, France, Belgium, Monaco, Italy, Austria, Germany, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Spain, Poland, Switzerland, Belgium; 1932 – England, France, Spain, Egypt, Palestine, India, Ceylon, the Malay Peninsula, the Dutch East Indies, French Somaliland

and Ethiopia; 1936 – England, France, Spain, Germany, Poland, Latvia, Sweden, Denmark, Czechoslovakia, Rumania, Bulgaria, Turkey, Greece, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Austria, Belgium and Scotland; 1938 – Hawaii, Samoa, Fiji, Australia, the Solomon Islands and New Zealand; 1941 – Jamaica; 1946 – England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales; 1948 – Ireland, England, Switzerland, Holland, Belgium, France, Italy, Germany, Iceland and back to Jamaica; 1949 – Scotland, Ireland, England and Iceland; 1950 – England, Belgium, Norway, Scotland, Germany and Denmark; 1955 – Azores, Portugal, Senega., Liberia, the Gold Coast, Congo, Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia, South Africa, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, Egypt, Italy, France, England, Scotland and Newfoundland. Over 7,000 were converted in South Africa. 1957 – Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Peru, Equador, Colombia, Panama. These were the largest united evangelistic campaigns in the history of South America which saw some 4,500 conversions. Here the 67-year-old Smith preached to crowds averaging 15,000 nightly at the Luna Park indoor fight arena in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Three times over 20,000 attended. 300 churches participated and over 1,500 decisions were registered here: 1959 – Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Finland, England, Ireland and Scotland. During this trip he was received in Buckingham Palace. Then later in the year to Japan, a campaign in Hong Kong preaching to 3,000 nightly and Hawaii; 1960 – Alaska – Japan where 1,000 decisions for Christ were made in the 2,200 seat Kyoritz Hall auditorium campaign in Tokyo. 1961 – Hawaii, Fiji, Australia – where over 1,000 young people volunteered for foreign service. Later in the year it was England, Germany, Italy, Kenya, Rhodesia, South Africa, and Sudan; 1962 – Iceland; 1963 – Ireland, England and Wales. He nearly died on three of his trips because of poor health, which has plagued him all his life. Why such energy and talent given so unreservedly to Christ? Smith replies with a motto he originated that has become world famous, "Why should anyone hear the Gospel twice before everyone has heard it once?"

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The scores of sources used in obtaining data for this series are too numerous to mention, but the following is a list of some of those most frequently consulted.

Back issues of the following periodicals:

CHRISTIAN LIFE

CHRISTIANITY TODAY

DECISION

MOODY MONTHLY

POWER SUNDAY SCHOOL PAPER

SWORD OF THE LORD

Books

Who's Who in America

Encyclopedia American and the American Peoples Encyclopedia

20 Centuries of Great Preaching Word

Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge Baker

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Pulpit Giants (Donald Demaray) Moody Press

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Men of Fire (Walter R. Bowie) Harper and Row

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Deeper Experiences of Famous Christians (James Lawson) Warner Press

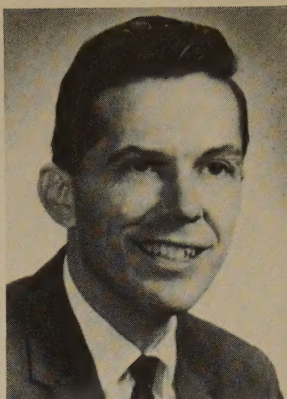
Modern Revivalism (Wm. McLoughlin) Ronald Press

The Sawdust Trail (Gordon L. Hall) Macrae Smith Company

Plus numerous other books, booklets and items from many sources.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Edward Reese graduated from the Moody Bible Institute in 1950. His varied background has included Youth for Christ ministries, service as a pastor, evangelist, musician (Cordovox recording artist), and missionary (Japan and Brazil). He now serves on the faculty of Hyles-Anderson College. He has also served as a



researcher and writer for Church League of America as well as a field representative for Second Coming, Inc. He is the founder and head of Fundamental Publishers.

Reese Religious Research provides information and reports on most phases of Christian knowledge. It began many years ago by collecting information on Christian personalities. A library including over 200 biographical volumes and thousands of back issues of Christian publications soon became a workshop. Hundreds of questionnaires were sent out and returned from living Christian leaders to assist in this particular series of concise and accurate biographies.

DEDICATION

To the many workers for Christ whose faithfulness and dedication are known only to God . . . who will write the last chapter to all biographies. — Matthew 25:21.

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